

Clay pots: Romans 8:1-11; Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23

Disconnectedness is the greatest threat to our spiritual security.

by [William R. O'Brien](#) in the [June 28, 2005](#) issue

My wife and I once toured the legendary Waterford crystal factory in Ireland, where furnaces roar 24 hours a day, powered by gas piped in from miles away. Sixteen hundred employees take turns at three shifts daily. Their training takes years, especially for the glass etchers, the smallest group among the staff.

A company policy explains why the Waterford products are so perfectly crafted. No seconds are allowed. Employees work in teams, and if a mistake is made at any point in the process, the glass is broken and discarded. The whole team is charged with the error, not just the one making the mistake. And the team starts again.

In the beginning the triune God created. God made no mistakes. Everything was good. Of all that God created, only humans marred the creation through their deliberate act of disobedience. It was not the Creator's image that was involved, but the creation's response. However, the "company policy" did not call for the creation to be crushed and destroyed. The Creating team was not the one penalized. Instead the penalty was built into the human act: the loss of connectedness.

Connectivity is more than a cyberspace buzzword. Interrelatedness defines the nature of creation. Modern systems theory suggests a worldview that connects everything. It affects physics, business, the environment and even politics. According to Thomas P. M. Barnett, geopolitics now divides the world into nations/groups that are connected and functioning by the same set of rules (the Functioning Core), and other nations/groups that are disconnected (the Nonintegrating Gap). Barnett emphasizes that this disconnectedness, characterized by a different rule set, is the source of instability and the greatest threat to national and global security, as in the case of the 9/11 events.

Disconnectedness is the greatest threat to our spiritual security both in the here and now and in the hereafter. But although the Edenic disconnection threatens the whole purpose of God, this Potter patiently continues to reshape the human vessel in love rather than destroying it out of disappointment or anger.

The God story as read through the lens of Hebrew and Christian scripture tells the story of a patient Creator-Redeemer. Once the disconnect occurred, God fashioned a people and authorized it to be a bridge to all peoples of the world. With the liberation of God's people from slavery in Egypt, a leader and the law emerged. The law was good as a standard of measurement, but not as a redeemer. Seeing how these "bridging" people ultimately confused the law for the Law Giver, the Creator God broke into human history. The incarnate Christ fulfilled the whole law, underscoring the priority of connectedness to God and to fellow humans. Through his sacrifice, Jesus was the Great Connector.

The clash between disconnectedness and connectedness was thereby cast in sharp contrast. Saul knew the law and defended it mercilessly. Given his training, one would think that any word from Jesus would fall on shallow soil or rocky ground or in the thorn patch of pride for this man, who was both a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin and a Roman citizen.

But Saul's encounter with the Word on the way to Damascus revealed some good soil, soil within that could receive grace and experience a change of heart and mind. Christ bridged what appeared to be an irreconcilable divide between law and grace, and now, through the Christ-lens, Paul saw the unfolding purpose of God from creation.

With stunning candor Paul recounts for the Roman believers his great agony in his inner war with the law. Neither his knowledge of the law nor his resolution to obey it fully could deliver him from his slavery to the law of sin. Then there was a flash of light, producing blindness of the eyes that revealed a blindness of the heart. As the spirit of Christ lifted the veil of the heart, a new way of seeing embraced the totality of Paul's being. He could exclaim to his intended readers, "There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1-2). While the mind of the sinful man is death, "The mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace."

In the disconnected state of a broken relationship with God there was no peace. God's grace connected with Paul's faith. No longer would Paul have the testimony of the Gadarene: "My name is legion, for we are many." A shalom kind of wholeness was growing within Paul as the spirit of Christ took up residence within him.

What a vital difference between Waterford crystal specialists who deal with inanimate sand and a Master Potter who shapes living clay. Paul affirmed that fact when he wrote to Corinthian believers, "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us" (2 Cor. 4:7).

Paul was the embodiment of a "living sacrifice" as he shared God's reconnecting love with peoples all across the Greco-Roman world. In city after city the disconnected opened themselves to Christ's offer of grace and forgiveness. The image of God within was restored and true communities of faith took root, some multiplying a hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. Today Christ followers on every continent experience the legacy of grace and the joy of knowing "there is now no condemnation."

The Master Potter is still patiently at work.